

Toward a Buddhist/Permaculture Ethic for Smallholders and Others



Risa Stephanie Bear
Stony Run Press

Natural farming, the true and original form of agriculture, is the methodless method of nature, the unmoving way of Bodhidharma. Although appearing fragile and vulnerable, it is potent for it brings victory unfought; it is a Buddhist way of farming that is boundless and yielding, and leaves the soil, the plants, and the insects to themselves. -- Masanobu Fukuoka

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Introduction

I'm Doyū Shōnin/Risa Bear and I study Soto Zen Buddhism with a teacher in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, who said: "Take care of things and they will take care of you."

I see relatively few references to Permaculture, smallholdings, organic agriculture, and support of local farmers on the otherwise exemplary and comprehensive *Ecological Buddhism* website (<http://www.ecobuddhism.org/>). Hence these "chapters," which originally appeared on my homesteading blog *A Way to Live* (<http://risashome.blogspot.com/>), as I look into these topics. You may also find them on the blog Buddhism and Permaculture (<http://buddhismpermaculture.blogspot.com/>).

Had enough of poisons but want something positive to do about it all? This little ebook may help point the way.

1. A pair of ethics toolboxes



Your author in skinnier days.

The following can be regarded as a pair of ethics toolboxes for designing a life. I'm still not clear on how to merge them into one, so this is practically a repost. If you've seen it all before, think of me as my own target audience, thinking out loud.

The first is derived from Buddhism. I find its core survives Occam's razor. Its basics are: four truths. And: eight ways for those truths to be manifested in your life.

Truth one: it's rough out there.

Truth two: it's rough because we (whether ourselves or others) want things to be different than they are.

Truth three: Not much we can do about others but we can change our behavior, so that things are less rough for us, at least internally.

Truth four is a simple method for these behavior changes. Here is the method with its eight parts -- they are interrelated; are really aspects of one thing, but broken down for utility.

1. Right *view*. See what's happening.
2. Right *aspiration*. Care about the things that matter, not the things that don't. Notice the things that matter are not things (esp. as in "possessions").
3. Right *speech*. When communicating with others, delete whatever would hinder them from discovering the truths and using this method. For example, hurtful snark.
4. Right *action*. Do not do unto others what you would not want done to you. Heard that before?
5. Right *livelihood*. Do not do for a living that which would hinder them from discovering the truths and using this method. Example: fracking engineer. Example: bankster. **The best occupations are probably smallholder and the crafts that support smallholders, along with infrastructure workers and the health professions, preferably preventive care.** I would include teaching, but prefer it in the form of apprenticeships.
6. Right *effort*. Conducting the parts of the method with due diligence.
7. Right *mindfulness*. Clarity of thought concerning the truths, the method and their goal of non-harm.
8. Right *concentration*. To achieve clarity of thought, discipline the mind. Simply refusing to load it up with extraneous chatter (from television or Facebook, for example) is a start. I attend Soto Zen Buddhist retreats. Your mileage may vary.

The second toolbox is the Permaculture Design principles, as formulated by David Holmgren in *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability* (2002). I find them to be, ultimately, the same box differently adumbrated.

The core ethics are generally expressed as "*earth care, people care, and fair share.*"

Social Darwinists (those not interested in ethics) tend to dispute these a bit, especially the third one. If you're one of these, likely you didn't get this far. You'll have bailed, perhaps with a "hmpf," and continued on your unhappy way. Socialism, as practiced by sovereign states, has not always led to ideal (whatever that means) conditions, but it is not inherently bad to help your neighbor, while it is inherently appropriate to help. Permaculture, like Buddhism, is effectively socialist and effective socialism, when not abused for personal gain. Try these three ethics. You may find you like them.

The ethics are applied in, usually, twelve kinds of activities usually called principles.

1. Observe and Interact. By taking the time to engage with nature we can design relevant solutions.
2. Catch and Store Energy. Developing systems to collect resources when abundant, we can use them in need.
3. Obtain a yield – Ensure that you are getting useful rewards from your work.
4. Apply Self Regulation and Accept Feedback – Efficient or resilient systems require noting and correcting inefficient or nonresilient practices.
5. Use and Value Renewable Resources and Services – as opposed to non-renewable resources.
6. Produce No Waste – “Waste not, want not.”
7. Design From Patterns to Details – Observe patterns in nature and society. Test their appropriateness broadly, rather than losing yourself in detail.
8. Integrate Rather Than Segregate – By putting the right things in the right place, relationships develop, creating efficiencies and resiliences.
9. Use Small and Slow Solutions – Small is beautiful.
10. Use and Value Diversity – “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket” -- be resilient.
11. Use Edges and Value the Marginal – These are often the most valuable, diverse and productive elements in the system.
12. Creatively Use and Respond to Change – We can have a positive impact on inevitable change by carefully observing and then intervening at the right time.

The principles are applied in seven "domains" that have been elucidated. These: The Natural Realm, Building(s), Tools (Technology), Education/Culture, Health (Well-Being), Economics ("as if people mattered"), Governance (participatory democracy preferred).

I'm aware that some leaders in Buddhism and Permaculture have historically and have continued to fall short of the ethics enumerated here, particularly in the treatment of women by men in positions of authority. So what's new? I'm all for rooting out the predatory. But I'm going to practice as long as I see the utility of practice.

You are here for only a moment, less than a moment in the universe's time. Clear the mind, open the "heart," open the hands, work for and with and not against.

2. Right action can be all eight spokes of the wheel

An analysis of the four truths and eightfold way of Buddhism as a unified concept which could be expressed as Right Action.

Primum non nocere, a medical directive, means, "First, do no harm."

It's rough out there.

That it's rough out there can be taken as a given. Some of us are insulated from the consequences of inappropriate action through the inequitable accumulation of resources, but the effect is temporary and I think a kind of self-harm accrues, to ourselves and our loved ones. Certainly harm comes to others.

Hence: "it's rough because we (whether ourselves or others) want things to be different than they are." We suffer when we have expectations or unrealistic intentions. Others suffer when we attempt, through action, to enforce our expectations. We take an inappropriate action.

"We can change our behavior," that is, we can learn to select appropriate actions.

So, *Right Action could serve as the key concept drawing the Buddhist and Permaculture toolboxes together.*

Right view could be taken as observe clearly, which is a kind of action.

Right aspiration could be taken as a kind of action, in which one connects observation to volition. Separating appropriate desires from inappropriate desires, with an intent to manifest the appropriate desires, is an internal activity, but an important one. "Cessation from all desires" is a misleading concept in this context, as it lacks the qualifier "appropriate." If one fails to desire to breathe, no right actions will follow.

Right speech is certainly an action, through the choice to say or not say, as needed. A friend often says: before speaking, ask yourself, "is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?"

Hence, right action. And is your action kind? Is it true (correct)? Is it necessary? These three combined are what is meant by "appropriate" as used here.

Right livelihood is right action in the sense of "obtain a yield." If benefits accrue to you and others by your actions you already have right livelihood. Do not think this is limited by or to the earning of money.

Right action must be carried out, not merely thought of. One applies one's energy to the task. So right effort is about action.

Right mindfulness, also, does not just happen. To clear away obstacles and focus, though it occurs in the mind, is an internal action without which appropriate external activity will not occur.

Right concentration is what occurs in meditation, i.e., the suppression of distractions so as to observe directly. So we have come full circle in this exercise, as the finding that it's rough out there is an observation. You have taken the action to find that out, to discover the cause (which can be boiled down to selfishness) and the cure (which can be boiled down to selflessness).

"Ethics" need not be taught in a university, nor demanded in a church (that's "morality," a different kind of animal). It is as simple as breathing. Want happiness? When you rise up in the morning, set your face toward the doing of right action, that is, whatever is kind, true, and necessary.

3. Permaculture ethics and principles in the light of Buddhism



Grassroots Garden, Food for Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, USA

"*Earth care*" is right action. Preventing soil loss, water pollution, excess atmospheric carbon, and radiological contamination are examples.

"*People care*" is right action. Active listening, feeding with good food, offering clean water, assisting with shelter and teaching right action are examples.

"*Fair share*" is right action. Living within one's means and finding small means sufficient opens up possibilities for others are examples.

These actions may be carried out in all of life, for example, within nature, architecturally, through responsible choice and use of tools, in teaching, in health care, in gift and exchange, in coming together on governance (the mutual determination of right action).

"Observation," as noted in the preceding post/note, is right action.

"Obtaining energy" in an ethical way (without destroying the life or livelihood of others, and without excess) is right action.

"Obtaining a yield" -- primary production (forestry, agriculture, manufacturing) in an ethical way for your livelihood (without destroying the life or livelihood of others, and without excess) is right action.

"Self-regulation" (evaluating and redirecting one's actions. Also: accepting criticism) is right action.

"Choosing to reduce, reuse, recycle, repurpose, and renew" -- over the opposites of these -- is right action.

"Eschewing wastefulness", which is closely related to the preceding principle, is right action.

"Designing from patterns to details" -- close observation and imitation of natural cycles -- is right action.

"Integrating rather than segregating processes" -- closely related to the three preceding principles -- is right action. Incorporating a chicken moat into the homestead protects the garden from the hens and from the insects and mollusks the hens eat, for example.

"Using small and slow solutions" -- mulch rather than a tractor where a mulch will do -- is right action.

"Honoring diversity in all things" -- human and in nature (which comes to the same thing) -- is right action. Consider, for example, the resiliency of mutually respected vibrant culture and the resiliency of a food forest or polycultural vegetable garden.

"Using edges and valuing the marginal" is right action. This is related to honoring diversity; from the edges in society come imagination and innovation; from the edges in the landscape come wildlife and species interaction, preventing outsized populations of "undesirable" species without chemical invention among other benefits.

"Using and responding to change" is right action.

Πάντα ῥεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει

All things flow. Ride the river of life.

4. Right seeing



We begin by seeing our mistake. Separateness in the here and now is illusory, and our mental pictures of the past or future, laced with a desire to have things our own way, are also illusory. The universe with all that is in it is one thing. This is why it is right to resist the spreading of poisons in agriculture, the land, the skies, the sea, and in our cities, and to resist the spreading of fear (oppression) and of war (oppression also). The cause of the spreading of poisons, fear and war is the lack of accountability due to greed, and the correction of this sickness is accountability -- accepting responsibility for both the visible and invisible costs of our actions, and adjusting those actions accordingly, so that we may act with clarity and justice. Capitalism is (or certainly has become) systematized avoidance of justice. We can do better than this.

5. *Right desire*



Desire is sometimes given a bad rap by good and thoughtful people. That's because it is conflated with acquisitiveness. We often wish to accrue money, fame, a lover, electronic toys, a car. But surely it is not wrong to desire health, cleanliness, comradeship, companionship, mercy, and justice for ourselves and others. So, right desire can be the motivator toward living a principled and clarified life. We see by this how far from these good things we can be led by advertising, propaganda, and selected "news" -- which may be but advertising and propaganda put forth by the unprincipled for the sake of a greedy and almost universally hurtful agenda. On a warm day we may desire to walk together to the lake or to sit under a tree and look across the river toward the mountain; in cold rain we may desire to sit by a fire with tea. These are good things; yet by wishing as much for others we find the springboard toward right action.

6. Right saying



The world is coming to be defined by competing slanders and obfuscations. Clarity, honesty, openness and nurture are revolutionary. What really needs to be said? Are you the one to say it? How, when and where will it be most helpful? There are those who break silence only when it will be like a sunrise, and we know to treasure them.

7. Ethics are not your beliefs, they are what you do



Key to understanding why there are eight parts to the long-established Buddhist way and twelve principles to the more recent Permaculture way is this concept of "right doing."

If we are alive, we do some things. But perhaps some of them are thoughtless things. Then it behooves us to think this through. To do well, it may help to have (and keep to) a plan. (If we are uncomfortable calling what we do by the names given here, we may use other names. The important thing is the action.)

The Buddhist way may in general practice be reduced to the Golden Rule: do not do to others what you would not have done to yourself.

The Permaculture principles are thought to be an expression of three ethics, caring for the earth, caring for people, and fairness -- which is really but one ethic, and may also in general practice be reduced to the Golden Rule.

Everything unfolds from the observation that there is one observable reality, regardless of how it may be described, and that therefore in some sense there is no one or nothing from which we can be divided. Care for the earth is people care and is sharing.

So we can try this experimentally. See, feel, say (or refrain from saying), do, earn, strive, think, and manifest caring and sharing. We may find that it works, and that our cynicism has been a hindrance. Why should we ever be bored a single moment in an awakened life dedicated to right doing? It's not really harder than wrong doing.

8. *Work well*



From right doing, right work naturally flows. It is understandable if one has had to keep working at a fast-food place to help support one's children, but one must also keep an eye out for a better livelihood, as fast-food places poison the population.

In general few jobs meet this principle, as the world system has grown toward wage slavery to enrich those already rich, to most of whom the prospect of such enrichment doing harm to the population is of little or no concern.

It can be helpful to learn a craft or trade that may provide safe and nutritious food, clean water, goods or services that are as free as possible of harm through exploitation -- or debt, which is exploitation at one remove (including the system whereby corporate entities prioritize shareholders rather than the good of society and the biosphere).

It can be objected that looking into the probable effects of work is attachment to outcomes. Not necessarily. The spirit of one's commitment to the eightfold way is to acquire a certain level of skill in not doing harm, not to acquire praise or reward for so doing. Remain in the now and do well.

9. Focus, focus!



Action, to be correct action, must spring from focus. If we react mainly to provocation, or take action aimlessly, our contribution will be correspondingly small. If we visualize a worthwhile project, and concentrate on it day and night, our impact will be the greater.

First we ascertain that our vision is "worthwhile." Then, whether we mean to create a one-acre food forest or manage a great nation's food system, we must focus on the task at hand and give it our all.

We can see, as we work through these principles, how each of them is a facet of a single principle. It becomes clear to us that right desire and right focus are practically the same. Right focus and right avocation, or livelihood, are also the same. The path is described as having eight parts so that we can absorb the lesson in manageable chunks.

Dogen uses the words "die sitting, die standing" to indicate the urgency we should bring to taking our path seriously. That doesn't mean don't have a sense of fun or play. It does mean not frittering away our minds endlessly on inconsequential matters -- a major trap for us in these times.

10. Right singularity



I've been covering, in my idiosyncratic way, the eight points of the eightfold path promulgated by Gotama when he snapped out of his long bout of meditation, determined to save the world. We've arrived at the last one, and it's a doozy.

Meditation is said, when undertaken correctly (whatever that might be), to get you the whole enchilada.

Well, it does. But it's generally offered embedded in pietistic hooraw: that "various levels or modes" thing can easily, and I suspect very often, be the money clause: "This stuff takes years, kid. Support me the whole time and I might get you there."

I like and recommend meditation's ability to show, experimentally, such reality as we're equipped (as brains with sampling systems -- eyes, ears, etc.) to appreciate. And it takes some appreciation of what's what for there to be some justification for the other seven aspects of the path.

But it would be a mistake to go sit with the idea of "attaining" some kind of holiness. Attempting to become someone special (which is patently impossible) is exactly what Gotama would have you not do -- it would be the very illusion he returned to his friends to warn against.

So let's do a simple intellectual exercise. 'K?

You can imagine animals and plants arising from the biosphere, not as anything separate from the biosphere, the planet, the galaxy, the universe, but as aspects of all of the above -- it's all one thing, taking a variety of shapes, like thoughts in a mind. Yes?

But, wait -- are you an observer, outside of this image, or are you in it? The center of the universe, or an aspect of the universal?



Stolen from Paul Watson (Sea Shepherd Society)

I think we have to understand ourselves as, in our individuality, provisional beings at best, an aspect of the universal, to go on from here to the twelve principles that have been adumbrated as those of Permaculture. As foraging and farming and trading beings (which we have to be to live) we intervene with the plants and animals around us for our own benefit. How we do so may matter: what if they are our equals? What if it's important to show some respect? Hmm?

We know we have been destructive. How do we become less destructive, or are there even ways in which we can be constructive? If we are going to undertake to change the world for the "better," it's awfully important that the results be, umm, for the better.

'Cuz if we don't have good evidence for what we're doing, better we shoulda stayed on that couch, watching the commercials.

11. The holistic way



If we look up "holistic" we find, apart from the narrower medical term, that it means "characterized by comprehension of the parts of something as intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole."

It is a term used by Permaculturists and is the point of Permaculture; treat this life (the "world") as a whole system of which we are a part, rather than as a set of resources (separate from us: objectified) to be exploited for profit, regardless of externalized costs.

No one invented Permaculture; IIRC it is a word originated by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren while considering whole systems in the context of agriculture in Tasmania. Permaculture principles as a set of ideas or design tools are in flux, as the movement's leadership is diverse and democratic, with new knowledge added all the time, so this series of posts will become dated quickly. Note that while no one owns the word "Permaculture" Mr. Mollison has asked that anyone intending to make actual money as a Permaculturist take a Permaculture Design Course. As I have not done so, this ebook is free.

I think Permaculture as a mass movement is hobbled by the perception that many people and media have that it is limited to New Age and hippies. If it were to shed that perception (as it is beginning to do) and become more widely implemented, it would (will) run afoul of the authorities, who have no intention of being supplanted by an ethical (hence largely anti-capitalist) agenda. This has happened to the Whole Systems movement before (<http://thearchdruidreport.blogspot.com/2009/12/political-ecology-of-collapse.html>).

That said, with the fossil fuels rapidly approaching a EROEI (Energy Returned On Energy Invested) of 1:1, the planet heating as a result of the massive overuse of same, and the likely consequent famines, resource wars, revolts, and corporate and governmental collapse, those who have been feverishly working to create sustainable practices may or may not find a way for humanity to muddle through but remain the only game in town.

I think the ethic (the "three ethics") as stated on permacultureprinciples.com is spot on. "Earth Care, People Care, Fair Share." Viewed through the monist glass, we can say that all this is Earth Care, people and their basic needs being a part of the holistic whole.

Here are the principles again:

1. Observe and Interact. By taking the time to engage with nature we can design relevant solutions.
2. Catch and Store Energy. Developing systems to collect resources when abundant, we can use them in need.
3. Obtain a yield – Ensure that you are getting useful rewards from your work.
4. Apply Self Regulation and Accept Feedback – Efficient or resilient systems require noting and correcting inefficient or non-resilient practices.
5. Use and Value Renewable Resources and Services – as opposed to non-renewable resources.
6. Produce No Waste – “Waste not, want not.”
7. Design From Patterns to Details – Observe patterns in nature and society. Test their appropriateness broadly, rather than losing yourself in detail.
8. Integrate Rather Than Segregate – By putting the right things in the right place, relationships develop, creating efficiencies and resiliences.
9. Use Small and Slow Solutions – Small is beautiful.
10. Use and Value Diversity – “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket” -- be resilient.
11. Use Edges and Value the Marginal – These are often the most valuable, diverse and productive elements in the system.
12. Creatively Use and Respond to Change – We can have a positive impact on inevitable change by carefully observing and then intervening at the right time.

And, we’ll go over them one by one.

12. See what is right to do



"Right seeing" in the Buddhist sense is easily taken as a negative -- noticing where we as human beings have gone "astray." But it can also mean "see what is right to do," referring by implication to such things as right action and right livelihood. "*Observe and interact*" in the Permaculture sense is also active. The assumption is that the universe has no "astray" and that by studying the life and energy flows around us, we can more closely attune our actions to what is, instead of trying to buck the system, which we are prone to do because we are living either in the past or the future, which are imaginary places.

Both principles are the same.

Watch what the sun, moon, sky, landscape, waterscape, plant communities, insects, animals, human communities, institutions and people around you are doing. What are the rhythms? What happened before? What is going on right now? What can we reasonably anticipate? How is that changing?

Wisdom is to be in and of the flow, putting a hand in where it is needed, but also knowing when it's not about us and when to wait.

13. Power up



The second Permaculture Principle is called "*Catch and Store Energy.*" As with most of the Principles, if you look for it in the Eightfold Path, it pretty much falls under Right Doing and Right Livelihood. Livelihood is not necessarily a job; if your house warms in the sunshine during the winter day and keeps you warm for at least part of the night, that captured sunshine is income to you, and therefore part of your livelihood. Designing the house to do that is acting according to both Buddhist and Permaculture ideals, since sunshine is not stolen from anyone (unlike petroleum, quite a lot of which has been stolen through the judicious use of lawyers, politicians, and militaries). Growing your own fuelwood or using a ram pump to lift water to the homestead from a stream on the property would also fit this pattern. So would investing together in a community solar power system or wind turbine. These have issues of hidden costs of manufacture, but it could be argued that they may be preferable to remaining grid-tied to coal or nuclear.

Energy efficiency is also income. By caulking, insulating and otherwise retrofitting a home, one reduces payout to the utility companies, freeing up income toward, saying, paying down a mortgage early.

Powering down is also "powering up." Assuming you are within range of whatever you need transportation to reach, and in reasonable physical condition, trading in the car for a bicycle eliminates car payments, fuel costs, the higher level of maintenance required by a car, associated governmental costs such as license plates, registration and smog inspection, and insurance payments, thus paying the mortgage even faster.

The image at the head of this chapter shows a solar hot water pre-heater. With a little tweaking, it could provide all hot water half the year, even at 44 degrees North where it resides. It's a salvaged hot water heater with half its jacket removed, painted black, surrounded by an insulated cold frame built onto the well's pumphouse. Currently all it does is heat well water before the water goes to the household electric hot water heater, passively collecting sunshine as income.

There are gigabytes of such projects, mostly in PDF form, at this link: http://www.fastonline.org/CD3WD_40/CD3WD/INDEX.HTM

14. *The grace of gathering*



Making sure the air and water are clean and the soil and oceans healthy, and working for the betterment of all -- people, animals, plants -- is certainly Right Doing, but eventually you yourself must sit down to a meal, drink the water, build a shelter for yourself, and keep warm or cool as dictated by circumstance. This is Right Livelihood/*Obtain a Yield*. Perhaps your job provides you an income -- say, at the farmer's market, the organic local-foods wholesaler, or a social agency. Or perhaps you have acreage, or a city lot, or an apartment patio and an allotment or community garden, or just the

patio, or just a windowsill. In all these settings some form of productivity is available, such that what you do rewards you with minimal detriment to others.

For years in the late 80s and early 90s, my work, at a local university, sustained the family, but we also had, on our small city lot, fruit trees, a garden, greenhouse and flock of ducks. We saved seed, canned produce, gathered eggs. Because it rained a lot, we were known as the "rubber boot people."

The university was eight miles away by bike path. I commuted to work on a beat-up ten speed that had a basket between the drop bars and a milk crate on the rear rack. I learned where to find nettles, mint, apples, plums, pears, rose hips, and walnuts along my route. Often I arrived home carrying a full load.

We also learned to stretch our budget by buying, in a timely manner, twenty-five or fifty pound bags of rice, navy beans, pinto beans, lentils, split peas, oats, barley, wheat berries, and millet. Combining these (and the savings from my use of the bicycle and bus lines) with the garden and the occasional duck soup, our grocery bills (and doctor co-pays) were accordingly very low, and the five of us were able to double our mortgage payments. It helped that most of our entertainment was supplied by the local library.

Unexpected costs arose, of course: our only car, a little '84 Cavalier wagon, was demolished, while parked, by a drunk hit-and-run driver one night. But, even though we were below poverty level and the insurance paid very little for the car, our ongoing budgeting made it possible for us to recover.

One cannot always count on such disasters not to overwhelm one; prosperity, as the rich often forget, is not guaranteed by effort. But one can improve the odds. Even an unclaimed apple tree at the end of the alley provides a little more depth for your pocket, if you will use it.

15. No. Non. Nyet!



We can all find something to criticize in the way civilization is going. "No, non, nyet," we say all day long, on blogs, forums, and social media. But the Buddhist principle of "right saying" suggests another approach we can try, more closely related to a saying I've often heard: "Is it kind? Is it true? is it necessary? Then go ahead and say it."

In a tree-planting labor cooperative of which I was a member in the 1970s-80s, we had a practice (consciously borrowed from Marxism), used in crew meetings or the twelve-crew General Meetings, of "Criticism/Self Criticism." This is simply *Apply self-regulation & accept feedback*.

In a crew meeting one might say, "I criticize Risa for hogging up the gravy on the other side of the slash patch in the draw on the unit today, but I also criticize myself for waiting until now to say something -- I was afraid of pointing it out in front of the inspectors

but what I should have done was climb across the draw and explain what was bothering me, out of their hearing."

To which Risa might respond the patch was so small she thought doing it all herself would keep the others from having to clamber across the slick broken logs for so little income, but also criticize herself for not having voiced that terrain tactic openly, perhaps offering it to someone else to take on.

In this way the common loop of accusation/rejoinder at least has a chance of providing all parties with a chance at new insight.

Using such a communication strategy can strengthen a group taking on a permacultural design exercise, or a crew carrying out work within a permaculturally designed setting, converting potential conflict (a weakness) into a problem-solving process of discovery (a strength).



16. Use all, waste none



Japanese knotweed makes great beanpoles and bee hotels.

Let's consider two Permaculture Principles at once, as they are difficult to consider separately, in my mind.

We have all heard of "reduce, reuse, recycle": the waste hierarchy. This is where the idea fits into Permaculture, as principles number five and six. It also fits under Right Awareness in the Eightfold Way, as wastefulness is thought to be a prime indicator of an unenlightened life, showing disrespect for the universe and its inhabitants.

There is a story of three Zen monks seeing a succulent vegetable leaf drifting down a stream, and they discuss among themselves the likely heedlessness of whomever tossed it away. Then along the riverbank comes another monk, running with a hooked stick to retrieve it!

When designing a "permaculture" system, we are designing an "awareness" way of life, with efficiencies built in.

At Stony Run, we compost everything we can right on the garden, as part of the sheet mulch. But because chicken and duck manure should not be put on the beds during the growing and harvest times, we also maintain compost heaps. To these we add whatever food "waste" we can, plus grass clippings, plus leaves, and even the leaves and twigs left over from firewooding and pruning. Sticks may be woven into "wreaths" that encircle fruit trees; sawdust is collected as we make firewood and brought to the berry beds. Longer sticks provide for trellising, after which they may become kindling or be buried in the beds where they stood, as Hugelkultur smallwood. Comfrey grows at the feet of fruit trees, bringing up minerals for the tree roots and serving as a drought indicator, then is cut for the poultry until they don't want any more, the rest being added to the sheet mulch or steeped with willow bark to make growth tea for young plants and cuttings.

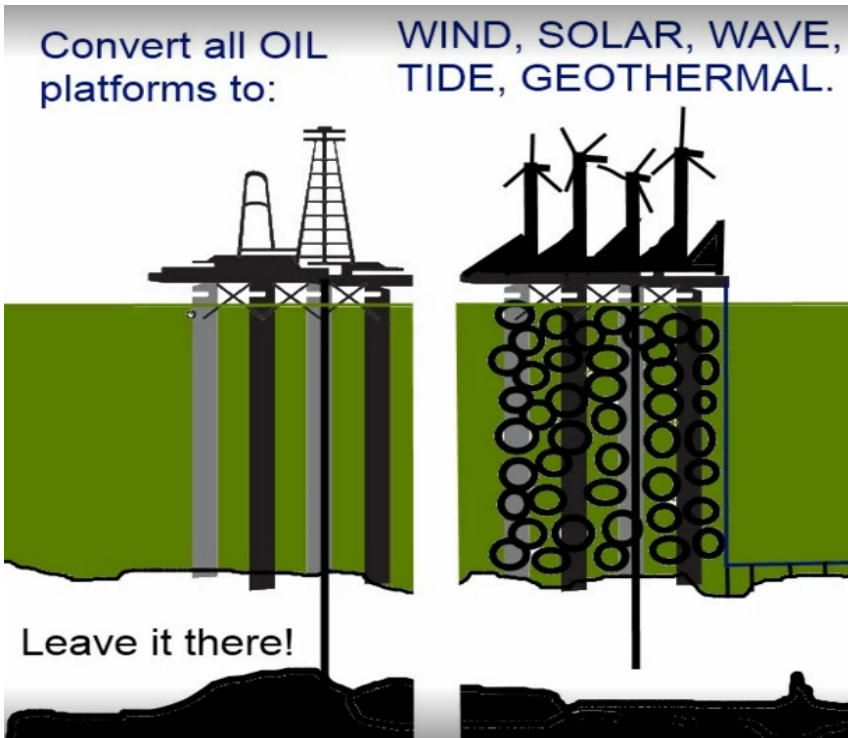
I use a stock pot of well water on the wood stove to soften pumpkins for the chickens, then use it for water bath canning, then pour off the hot water into a tub in the kitchen sink to pre-wash the canning dishes, then pour the triple-used water into a bucket that holds coffee grounds, food scraps, vegetable trimmings and the like, which I carry out to the compost heap.

Maybe I overdo it, hey? But it's not like I was doing anything more important at the moment. And if we think about this, a lot of our ideas about "more important" come down to "self-important," i.e. not really important after all. Might as well be carrying the water from the stove to the kitchen, then.

Do without. What you cannot do without, find ready to hand; what you cannot find ready to hand, make; what you cannot make, borrow; what you cannot borrow, rent; what you cannot rent, buy used; what you cannot buy used, buy local from an artisan, what you cannot buy local from an artisan, buy highest quality, cooperatively, and share. Maintain with care, and dispose of carefully. If possible, so manage your project that there is no waste stream at all leaving the premises.

Whatever has been dug from the earth is difficult to return to the earth in an adequately respectful manner; so it is both good Permacultural and good Buddhist principle to always distinguish use from abuse, touching the world sparingly.

17. Patterns are the yellow brick road



Remember *A Pattern Language*? 1977! It's still out there.

I remember the review in *Coevolution Quarterly*. I instinctively felt that, while the author was limiting himself to articulating home, neighborhood and city construction onto observable natural patterns and cycles, the underlying principle (observe, then imitate) would be applicable to any human endeavor. I immediately became interested

in Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson and other scientists who were investigating positive feedbacks in loop systems (Cybernetics, Systems Theory).

Take the "meme" illustration above. Remembering that a species that discovers and adapts itself to a reservoir of food or water (as opposed to an income stream from an offsite source) will exploit that reservoir, explode in population, and then die off, I created it as an activist statement arguing that we should move from fossil fuels to renewables.

Or die.

My meme does say "leave it there" but doesn't get into what happens (by way of temperature regime) to the oceans, the soils, the atmosphere, the biosphere, and us, if we don't (the stuff being absolute poison). I really only argue the danger of living off principal rather than income, which should be sufficient information right there. And the income sources imitate nature: the solar panels, for example, are at least partly an analog of chlorophyll.

Systems Theory is very clear on how all this works, but you don't have to be a scientist to follow the argument. If you have a checking account, try living on principal without income.

One day a check bounces. Welcome to the scintillating world of dumpster diving and dying under a bridge.

In Permaculture, one captures revenue streams by imitating nature: all twelve principles speak to this, so you know Permaculture is, in its disarmingly homespun way, a return of the somewhat disenfranchised.

For a particularly comprehensive application of pattern languages (Permaculture Principles, Right Work (alla same) see this remarkable series of little videos:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLHRH3U16SJZ3d6IyjN9oSoDYizAvPmNVG)

[list=PLHRH3U16SJZ3d6IyjN9oSoDYizAvPmNVG](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLHRH3U16SJZ3d6IyjN9oSoDYizAvPmNVG) (They are also available in Japanese)

18. All together now



The Permaculture site that we're following in this meandering series of posts discusses Principle Eight mostly in terms of interpersonal relationships. Anyone watching an Amish barnraising will get an inkling of the truth they're driving at here.

It's also true for plant and animal communities. I sometimes mix a batch of the smaller seeds in a spice shaker and plant on a hexagonal grid, with one-foot intervals or so. What comes up, comes up. After maybe one thinning, I let the bed design itself. What we get is more insect resistant, utilizes water more efficiently, stands up to heat and cold better, and utilizes the available nutrients more -- companionably, seems to me.

The chickens and ducks roam the surrounding orchard, cleaning up fruit and pests, and are allowed to rake over the beds in winter.

I've planted firewood trees in the orchard, as well, and the chickens inspect the downed coppicings as I separate them into compost, hugelkultur pieces, beanpoles, kindling, and sawlogs.

At the farm where my son works, everybody is cheek-by-jowl all the time; it's good for them and they certainly get a lot done. I'm, from most people anyway, more isolated, perhaps by choice; it's a mixture of introversion and severe hearing impairment, partly. but I claim the company of the garden, orchard and flock. Plus the joy of handing over a dozen eggs to the occasional visitor.

I will admit to being a moderate grump here. A while back (<http://risashome.blogspot.com/2009/07/its-jungle-out-there.html>) I objected that while Permaculture Principles seemed sound, images of people doing those expensive teach-ins called PDCs (Permaculture Design Courses) seemed to me to evince an attempt to revive the touchy-feely sit-in-circles-and-gush stuff that went on in the Sixties. I'm just ... not there. With a suspicion that one shouldn't participate in anything that can lend itself to accusations of being a pyramid scheme and, to some extent, a cult of personality.

Toby Hemenway has a terrific discussion (<http://www.patternliteracy.com/770-trojan-horses-recipes-and-permaculture>) of the success of Transition (<http://www.transitionnetwork.org/>), a movement that incorporates Permaculture Principles at every turn but appeals to folks more than does Permaculture as a movement. He notes that Transition uses, or appears to use, recipes where a Perma guru seems to try to make a chef of you on the spot. I would add that in Transition your town still looks familiar after the measures have been adopted, rather than being taken over by crystal gazers, spiral gardens and ferny forests -- it's more ... comforting. And somehow seems less likely to spark derisive opposition from some parts of the political spectrum. Perhaps Permaculturists should notice how integrative Transition is. You must begin with the communities that are already there, I think.

Where all this fits into Buddhist principles is not so much with the Dharma wheel (Eightfold Way) which is a pattern for individual ethics, but with what are called the Three Jewels (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Jewels). "I take refuge in the Buddha (Gautama as teacher, Buddha-nature as teacher); I take refuge in the Dharma (the teachings); I take refuge in the Sangha (the fellowship of those who follow the teacher/teachings)."

In the Sangha we have an ancient example of an articulated system to support the dissemination and practice of the ethical system of Gautama. It's not without its abuses, however, humans being what we are. Hierarchism, as elsewhere, may be to blame; sexism, racism and even genocide are the consequences of people holding themselves to be separate from and higher than.

Between touchy-feely and strife, hold a middle ground: work together for the good of all the waters, soils, winds, the plant and animal communities, holding every child, woman, and man to be your neighbor.

19. Small is truly beautiful



One acre farm

As to Permaculture Principle 9, "*Use small and slow solutions*," they are hitting me where I live. Most of the following has appeared on the "A Way to Live" blog twice.

When I see so many of my friends and neighbors thrown out of work, I'm reminded of that moment in Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* when the protagonist's car breaks down, and a crowd of the great mass of unemployed gathers, which he views with suspicion until one of them wistfully says, as nearly as I can remember it from a distant read: "Maybe I could look at it for you. I used to be pretty good with my hands."

The generation now in charge has mostly not read E. F. Schumacher, which is a sad fact. My copy of *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (Perennial Library, 1973) is forty years old; it's a crumbling paperback, yellow and a bit musty, that has traveled with me, long un-reread but treasured, crisscrossing the Northwest with me when I worked in the woods, and the nation when I worked in Pennsylvania.

If we thought Schumacher's views were important then, we should read him now. Everything he found urgent has become more so. Samples:

...one of the most fateful errors of our age is the belief that the problem of production has been solved. This illusion ... is mainly due to our inability to recognize that the modern industrial system, with all its intellectual sophistication, consumes the very basis on which it has been erected it lives on irreplaceable capital which it cheerfully treats as income. (20)

And:

An attitude to life which seeks fulfillment in the single-minded pursuit of wealth -- in short, materialism -- does not fit into [the] world, because it contains within itself no limiting principle, while the environment within which it is placed is strictly limited. (29-30)

By "limits" he means three things; fossil fuels, natural systems with their feedback loops, and human limitations (that they can tolerate only so much of a life that is functionally no more than slavery, or consumerism, or both). He believes if he can prove his point with any one of the three, he has made his case.

Economics, as practiced by industrial society, is in Schumacher's view fatally fragmentary: the society's judgments

are based on a definition of costs which excludes all "free goods," that is to say, the entire God-given environment, except for those parts of it that have been privately appropriated. This means that an activity can be economic although it plays hell with the environment, and that a competing activity, if at some cost it protects and conserves the environment, will be uneconomic. (43)

Thus you have the strange condition in which extraction of oil from the ground, poisoning the land, water, air, and ourselves, is an activity which can be rationally charted as economic, and leaving it

there so that we can breathe, avoid being roasted by climate change, and survive as a species, cannot.

One effect of the fragmentary view of the world encouraged by industrial economics is that agricultural work is regarded as of little value; since agriculture is seen in this view to be simply another kind of factory, and no "profit" can be extracted from it unless it is practiced on an industrial scale, more farming must be done by fewer and fewer people and the rural population is displaced into the cities to look for work there, adding to the enormous problems of social disintegration and grinding poverty that appear in urban settings.

The subtitle of the book is "Economics as if People Mattered." Schumacher was a Catholic Distributist, and regarded St. Thomas Aquinas as the underpinning of his understanding of science. He knew that much of his audience would be unwilling to hear him if he made much of this at the time, so he devised a clever and famous chapter, "*Buddhist Economics*." (Emphasis mine.) A discussion framed in Buddhist terms served his immediate aims just as well as one framed in Christian terms, for his point was that economics ought to serve humanity and not the other way round; and economics cannot serve humanity on its terms, for that which makes us human is unquantifiable in dollar amounts.

What is desirable to the materialist economist is undesirable to the Buddhist economist and vice versa, so that their aims in the short term are diametrically opposed. This is because the Buddhist economist has an interest in the long term, which is an interest that is unquantifiable in the industrial economist's system.

Buddhism is concerned with the alleviation of suffering so that one can focus on understanding one's self and the universe better, with the aim of right living, of choosing a path that promotes one's own well-being and that of all others: what are called "sentient beings" in Buddhist lingo. So the way of Buddhism trends toward peace and the way of a materialist system trends toward the opposite:

As the world's resources of non-renewable fuels -- coal, oil and natural gas -- are exceedingly unevenly distributed over the globe and undoubtedly limited in quantity, it is clear that their exploitation at an ever-increasing rate is an act of violence against nature which must inevitably lead to violence between men Before [materialists in Buddhist countries] dismiss Buddhist economics as nothing better than a nostalgic dream, they might wish to consider whether the path of economic development outlined by modern economics is likely to lead them to places where they really want to be. (61)

All well and good; but as with almost all liberals, one might expect that at this point Schumacher will rest on his laurels, having simply noted that what we are all doing is a Bad Show. But, unlike others, he has a specific set of proposals toward what might be a Better Show.

Schumacher notes that when local people produce local goods for other local people, the relationship, the bond, between them, that sense of well-being for which industrial economy can find no place in its equations, is strengthened.

Hence what are called "economies of scale" -- nation-states, multinational corporations, mass production, and export -- are false economies because they encourage bankruptcy in those three things, the state of the planet, of its non-renewables, and of the well-being of its beings.

Whereas local economies, inefficient as they are in those equations, tend to conserve the Three Things.

It's true, notes Schumacher, that in what are called Third World countries, there are what might be called one-pound (or we Americans could say one-dollar) workplaces, and life is marginal and sometimes prey to drought, disease, etc. But the cure proposed by the industrial economy is to bring in one-thousand-dollar workplaces, which cannot be justified economically except through extractive export strategies that ultimately only benefit the industrial chieftains in the developed countries.

Local people, on seeing the implementation of these impressive workplaces, often give up (and forget how to return to) their own one-dollar strategies, expecting full employment, except that the one-thousand-dollar solution, due to its capital cost, cannot be emplaced

quickly enough to provide this. So from marginal existence a great many of them go straight to a starvation existence. Also, full employment was never a goal of the industrial economy in the first place. Fear tends to be regarded by the captains of industry as a great motivator, and pools of underutilized labor can be tapped for new projects at "reasonably" low wages.

Schumacher proposes an "intermediate" solution.

Devise the one-hundred-dollar workplace, using technologies that can be built and managed locally, to produce a higher standard of living by marketing the product locally.

To the objection that local people from a one-dollar background have no buying power, he answers that with the ten-times-cheaper-than-industrial-scale one-hundred-dollar workplace, you can do ten startups simultaneously, with the goods from one workplace affordable to the workers in one of the other nine.

There is thus no need to export, eliminating the need to carry on in the extractive and eventually bankrupting manner to which the West is addicted. Also, rural populations, by recovering a measure of independence and self-worth locally, are then not so easily driven to the urban ghettos, which reduces the strain on the megalopolitan cities which our industrial economy has created.

This sounds Utopian, but in fact his approach has been extensively tested. To show what would be examples of intermediate technology, applied to local economies by the local people themselves and not by well-intentioned but locally ignorant strangers, he formed, with other scientists and interested parties, a barely capitalized organization called the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG).

They still exist, as the nonprofit Practical Action (<http://www.practicalaction.org/>), thirty years later.

ITDG, with little real cooperation and much disdain from the developed nation-states and megacorporations, has for four decades doggedly kept up its mission of demonstrating the economic and scientific principles of E. F. Schumacher, and carried out numerous local initiatives, always sharing the lessons learned with anyone who seeks them out.

In the field of local energy development, they began with the obvious: people in developing countries depend on biomass for energy, and open fires waste energy. So ITDG designed low cost cooking stoves to reduce impact on the forests and other vegetative cover, as well as the tremendous labor expended, usually by women

and children, in going farther and farther to strip the landscape of available fuel.

When a locality is ready for more, Practical Action is ready with more: micro-hydro plants, small scale wind generators, solar lanterns, biogas.

A serious bottleneck for local production, which cannot easily reach even local markets in rural areas of undeveloped countries, is transportation. Practical Action offers expertise in locally controlled construction of cycle trailers, improved ox and donkey carts, and efficient low-technology road building.

I refer those interested to Practical Action's website to grasp the scope of their activities. None of the ideas described are vaporware; they have applied them all in the real world and have the stories of local communities where the projects are being carried out.

See their links on agroprocessing, food production, information and communications technologies, small-scale mining, water and sanitation, disaster amelioration, advocacy, and education.

One might think that Practical Action would have an extensive Peace-Corps-style volunteer program. That's not the case. They seem to be a low-overhead operation, focused on getting information into the hands of the rural populations that need it, rather than bringing in mysterious expertise as if from some "higher" realm, *deus ex machina*, to carry out projects little understood by those they "help."

What is wanted is accessible knowledge, the kind created not for but in cooperation with rural populations in "Third World" countries, the kind of knowledge that takes root in the heart of the woman or man who says, "yes, I can do this." And we are all and have always been the "Third World," whether we think so or not.

20. *"In diversity there is beauty and there is strength"*



"Stacking"

“It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”

— Maya Angelou

Despite what some may tell you, human diversity is a strength, just as having three toppings on a pizza provides a greater range of nutrients. But I'm about income here ("Obtain a yield"), i.e., clean earth, clean air, clean water, relatively clean fire, good clean local food, low-impact shelter.

It's worthwhile to widen the variety of vegetables, cover crops, shrubs, trees and livestock to be found on the premises where you do your food scene, as monocultures, such as only doing tomatoes, results in faster depletion of specific nutrients and trace elements, which may lead to dependence on bought-in fertilizers and supplements, possibly damaging your soil and your watershed and affecting your health and that of your neighbors (including beneficial wild species in your biome).

Apple juice tastes better when you use range of varieties in the press, perhaps including crabapples, but what about throwing in a pear, a pawpaw, two or three persimmons, a handful of goumis and some grapes and blackberries if they are on hand? You're on your way to creating a health food made up of what's happening around you, in much the same way as a bear, passing through the woods and over the streams, assembles a varied diet from huckleberries, salmonberry, thimbleberries, Oregon grapes, mushrooms and salmon.

Try it both ways, offering traditional apple juice to visitors (so as not to throw them for a loop), reserving the more intense stuff as a "medicinal" concoction for your own needs. You may find yourself more resistant to a range of diseases in this way. (If the visitors are game, though, don't hold back.)

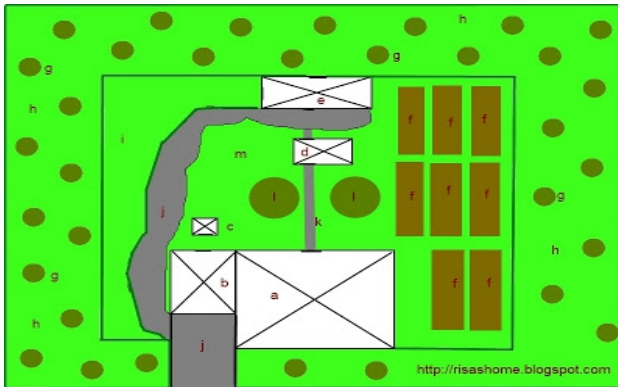
A cherry tree can do many things for you, as can a maple tree, but each does it differently, with different end results, and with some overlap. We have both residing on the south side of the house, for shade, and have added butternuts and figs in the same area. And who's to say this is not beautiful landscaping?

And it can be an exercise of right seeing, right action, right livelihood, right awareness to study your surroundings and discover how yet another vegetable, herb, berry bush or tree fits into your surroundings, and its products into your life.

What things prefer partial shade? Which ones tolerate tree roots? Which "weeds" should I encourage? What do I do to get unsprayed filberts without worms (catch them on a sheet, not letting them touch the ground)? Who is around to trade vegs and seeds or sell me a pair of ducks for the slugs? I don't have enough land (patio, balcony) to do any of this ... do we have allotments, community gardens, vacant lots in the neighborhood for the use of which I can sign up or negotiate? Does the city give away leaves? Should I build a bike trailer to go after them? Is it legal to add a beehive here? If not, can I change that?

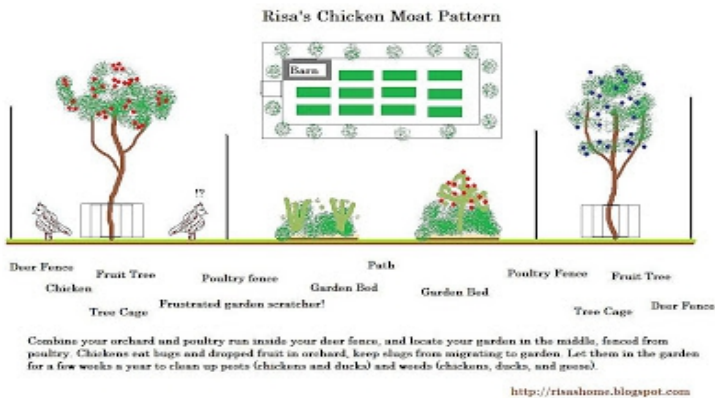
In every aspect of life, asking how one thing can do many jobs, or many things can do one job may add resiliency, which may be superior to its opposite, efficiency, in increasingly chaotic circumstances.

Though our place looks nothing like it, we have referred to this chart in planning:



a) House b) garage c) wellhouse d) garden shed e) barn/poultry house f) garden beds g) fruit trees h) chicken moat i) optional goats/sheep j) truck access k) walkway l) shade trees such as mature cherry or walnut. Not shown: plantings of tea, spices, berries, grapes, lavender, etc. m) place for humans to zone out.

With this for higher granularity in the concepts as they have played out:



Our implementation, annually updated:



Perhaps you wish to do these things and cannot access land of your own, a rental, or a community garden. In that case, you might try what Aaron Newton did in his neighborhood, and which he reported on in my all time favorite blog post by anyone ever. See: <http://poweringdown.blogspot.com/search?q=neighborhood+design>

21. Peripheral visions



Habits of urban, suburban, and, in my area, even rural people are: drive to work (or the unemployment office), gas up the car, get groceries, maybe eat out, come home, watch television, meanwhile going farther and farther into debt. But suppose you lived close enough to your work to commute via feet, bicycle or bus (or train), grew (much of) your groceries and foraged as well, and allowed these activities to take up 'TV time'? Maybe a little less debt?

If the neighbors will permit it (perhaps by letting them in on it), what about grapes and kiwis on the back-lot fence? If the city or borough or county or parish doesn't mind, what about gardening the front yard, the right-of-way strip, the odd triangular bit on the corner that's not part of anyone's city lot? I volunteer at a small state park that is severely underutilized, and the rangers have tacitly offered me all the filbert poles, filberts, apples, black walnuts, wild mustard, and the like I can gather when my gorse pulling is done.

When I walk the dog, I wear a cloth bag over each shoulder and explore the pasture fence lines of the neighborhood. Apples, crabapples, rose hips, Oregon grape, and acorns are the current crop. Earlier there were plums.

When I lived alone in the city awhile back, I lived mainly on rice from a steamer, but added diced apple, quince and Asian pear slices, dandelions and lamb's quarters, with traces of lavender, mint and rosemary, all garnered from abandoned strips in the alleyways. There was even kale. My entire budget that year was four hundred fifty dollars a month. Most of my earnings were sent to the home place to help retire the mortgage.

Here at home one fence line is turning into a hedgerow, and affords blackberries, Oregon grapes, grapes, crabapples, wild cherries, beanpoles, and composting materials. The seasonal creek's banks provide all that plus firewood and stones. I take my filbert (ok, hazel), willow, ash, maple and even Japanese knotweed poles to the compost heap and strip the leaves into the heap before moving on to the trellising.

From the garden we get all the usual things but also dandelions and other delicious weeds, popular with the chickens, as well as plantains, red clover, and other medicinals. Any part of the 'yard's' margins not doing anything else is put to work raising comfrey for the poultry and the compost heap.

Watch the seasons in the margins. For Buddhist purposes, this post is under 'right seeing' and 'right awareness'.

In some parts of the world, as well as among some marginalized populations in this country, all this is routine. Learn from those whose native language is not your own, learn from the parks, stream banks, abandoned lots, fence lines, property boundaries, edge plant communities and feral animals. What works for them?

Maybe it will work for you.

22. Prepping??



As to prepping: when it really hits the fan, there will be rationing, first in one place and then another. As that comes your way, you'll encounter increasing propaganda as to how prepping is really hoarding.

You know what hoarding is; it's irrational storage of stuff you're obsessed with, to the point of your being unable to function well -- you can't get to the bathroom because your heap of Pez bottles is in the way.

There's nothing irrational about, say, food preservation: canning, drying, freezing and fermenting your produce. Or buying farm produce cheap at the height of the season and processing it yourself in batches.

They're gonna yell at you anyway. You should be buying stuff (with your ration card) at the supermarket like everyone else; who do you think you are? Get in line!

There's a political side to that; you and I both know the "authorities" that will be telling you to tighten your belt will not be tightening theirs. That's already the way it is. But this tries to be a moderately apolitical blog, so ...

World War II home front propaganda posters made the distinction; those stocking up sacks of flour while others did without were in violation of the law; but those who could produce extra food for their families were encouraged, as that much more food could then be sent where it was needed.

So this rationing thing is meaningful up to a point, particularly in the cities. (watch Wartime Farm, especially the later, more desperate episodes.) If half the people in a siege have food and the other half don't, it gets harder -- much harder -- for everyone to pull together. But there has always been, even in fourteenth century Europe, the hope of the siege lifting, and life returning to "normal."

This time, there's a pretty good chance life is not going to be able to do that. Possibly for thousands of years, if ever:

<https://www2.ucar.edu/atmosnews/news/846/arctic-warming-overtakes-2000-years-natural-cooling>

<http://www.paulchefurka.ca/TF.html>

Infrastructure as we currently know it is not built to stand up to the coming changes, and it looks like we cannot afford to upgrade. People, especially in urban settings, may begin to misbehave. Preppers may be overwhelmed, and it will be at that point that they'll appreciate that the zombie movies were a horrendous metaphor.

At some point my neighborhood is going to have to band together and figure what are its resources and liabilities. At my age, I have little strength left and my sight and hearing are going. If I want to appear to my neighbors to be a resource, I may have to offer them potatoes. And there is satisfaction in having those to offer.

And then what, you may ask. Well, no one lives forever. If it comes to it, as I yield up my last jar of pickles, I may have to assume the role of Bret Harte's Mother Shipton:

"I'm going," she said, in a voice of querulous weakness, "but don't say anything about it. Don't waken the kids. Take the bundle from under my head and open it." Mr. Oakhurst did so. It contained Mother Shipton's rations for the last week, untouched. "Give 'em to the child," she said, pointing to the sleeping Piney. "You've starved yourself," said the gambler. "That's what they call it," said the woman, querulously, as she lay down again and, turning her face to the wall, passed quietly away. -- "The Outcast of Poker Flat"

There can be satisfaction in that, too.

Between now and then, just in case there's any such thing as a soft landing, or just because it's the right thing to do, improve your odds too of being useful to yourself and others.

Observe the changes and interact with your human, plant and animal neighbors in a resilient and respectful manner, adapting as you go. Find non-grid and non-fossil-fueled ways to catch and store energy, and prepare to share these locally. For as long as possible, feed yourself and not just others. Accept criticism, especially from yourself. Promote and exemplify the use of renewables, making no waste to the extent possible. Follow natural patterns and cycles, integrating yourself with your surroundings and recognizing the ultimate unity of all things great and small reveling in the diverse forms this unity can take. Work the margins and roll with the punches.

Personally, as I resolve to live by the Permaculture principles in the above paragraph, I also resolve to see, feel, say, act, work, strive, think, and focus wholeheartedly while I can. One does not have to make a religion of it. Sitting and watching a sunset, then washing the dishes before retiring for the night, are momentous things. When the time comes that I can no longer do such, I would prefer to go out well, and to be remembered as having been more a help than a hindrance to those around me.

23. From the ten ox-herding pictures and Permaculture Design to a way of life

One of my all-time favorite things is the Ten Ox-Herding Pictures, an effort to explain in graphics the typical "spiritual" journey of a Zen adherent.

The idea is that when we notice something seems "missing" in our lives, we go forth in search of it, and perhaps we find that a certain amount of self-discipline will get us what we think we want. In this case of this metaphor, the Ox represents "enlightenment." But, in the end, there was really nothing missing, the universe (of which we are a manifestation) is one thing, and in full realization of this we begin to forget ourselves and come back to the human community prepared to offer the benefits of this realization.

This herding of the ox resembles the process of noticing that civilization is damaging the earth and all its inhabitants, and of seeking an alternative to it. One of the alternatives some find is Permaculture, which with its adumbrated three ethics and twelve principles can be a handy framework for rolling up our sleeves and pitching in.

One might regard the pictures as applicable to the process of signing up for (and paying an ungodly amount for) a Permaculture Design Course (PDC), taking the hands-on classes, and receiving a certificate as a Permaculture Designer. The last image, "Entering the village with bliss-bestowing hands," lends itself to that nicely.

I'm not going to tell you not to go do this; we probably need all the Permaculture Designers we can get. I think there are some adjustments that could be made to the current system; correct me if I'm wrong, but doesn't it seem a little as if PDC teachers seem to be certifying more PDC teachers than keyline diggers, gardeners and foresters? Not everyone has all skills, and for a community to adopt a solution there may have to be some division of labor.

After a change of heart (mind), it's a good idea to also have a change of hands. As in *calluses*.

Toby Hemenway wryly notes the relative success of Transition as opposed to the PDC model, and points out that Rob Hopkins, the movement's co-founder, is a certified Permaculture Designer. He's kind of quiet about it, though. People tend to organize themselves in ways that are already familiar to them, and he's figured out how to play to that.

The genius of Hopkins' approach is that at first it's rather like organizing a Garden Show. Folks get together to eat, play music, watch a puppet drama, swap plants, and treat themselves to a not-overlong whiteboard session on how to muddle through should industrially-induced scarcities (of energy, food, affordable housing, clean water) threaten to strike in their neighborhood. It's issue-oriented and open-ended.

The open-ended bit is where the power of this approach lies. At the initial event, roles are propagated and a date fixed for the next get-together. And the next. Instead of a six-week intensive, it's a lifetime community learning experience, with coordinated action to build resilience into the group, the group's families, friends, neighbors and beyond.

Also, the "authorities" seem to have relatively little problem with Transition as a manifestation of community spirit. It seems a bit like the Rotarians as seen from the outside. Any time you can get the mayor to attend a ribbon-cutting for a storefront food-and-gardening supplies cooperative or a labor exchange is a definite plus.

Those bearing a PDC certificate who set themselves up as a teacher of PDCs or as a small business -- an independent site designer helping owners start their polyculture gardens and food forests -- are doing a good thing. Not only does the world need all of this it can get, it fits under Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. Getting paid to do it means not starving, as well, which fits under "Obtain a yield."

I think, though, that last picture in the ox-herding series contains one more step. "Entering the village with bliss-bestowing hands" involves the whole village and involves a gift-giving, gift-exchange local economy. This is neighborhood action, and it can take diverse forms; many of those involved will have never heard of Permaculture or even Transition Towns. Yet aspects of either will be found throughout, because good principles have a way of showing up, simply because they are often already known to be the best way to do things. Tradition can be a stumbling block but it can also be a guide.

Folkways often embody winning strategies.

Recognizing that the universe is one thing and what's going on is not primarily about me, I find myself doing what I know, as it seems time is short. It may not be the whole Permaculture enchilada, but the village is all around me, the day is wasting, and there are calluses to be earned.



"I enter the village with bliss-bestowing hands, having given up leashing of the ox forever."